



Testimony of Christopher Heneghan
Judiciary Committee
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Christopher Heneghan | Windham Harm Reduction Coalition Inc. | 75 Bridge St | Willimantic, CT. 06226
Cheneghan0@gmail.com | 860-234-7313

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Christopher Heneghan, the Director of Windham Harm Reduction Coalition. We work with over 300 individuals and families and affected by substance abuse, in Eastern, CT.

I'm here to lend my support to **HB 5487 AN ACT PROVIDING IMMUNITY TO A PERSON WHO ADMINISTERS AN OPIOID ANTAGONIST TO ANOTHER PERSON EXPERIENCING AN OPIOID OVERDOSE**. The changes proposed by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services will allow someone to administer Naloxone to bring someone out of an overdose, and call 911 for further assistance.

In 2009 the CDC announced that opioid overdose deaths reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Almost 40,000 American lives are lost each year to this preventable tragedy. It is the leading cause of accidental death in our nation surpassing, fire arms and motor vehicle accidents. On average one Connecticut resident dies each day of an opioid overdose.

Naloxone is an unscheduled drug with no abuse potential and a very favorable safety profile. Naloxone's only use is to bring someone out of an opioid overdose. It is similar to an epi-pen which many people use to prevent anaphylactic shock.

In the event of opioid overdose the window of opportunity for a lifesaving intervention closes rapidly, often before EMS is able to respond. Naloxone provides a critical safety net, extending that window of opportunity for 30 – 90 minutes.

Some policy makers have expressed concern that supporting this bill might be construed as a measure to condone drug use. There is an extensive body of evidence to the contrary. In fact, studies have shown, Naloxone induces the same unpleasant symptoms that opioid dependent individuals are trying to stave off with their opioid use. As such, people do not feel more comfortable using opioids more frequently or in higher doses because of Naloxone availability.

This legislation is already on the books. The additional language seeks to make it more workable. Sadly, I think most of us know someone who has struggled to manage an addiction. Opioid users are at highest risk of overdose, when they return home to their families following discharge from treatment. In the event of an overdose it is near impossible for an individual to administer Naloxone to themselves. This bill will allow the loved ones of those struggling with addiction peace of mind in knowing they can approach their family doctor and request a prescription for Naloxone without fear or stigma, so this lifesaving medication can be kept in their home.

Since 2009 we have lost nearly 10% of our agency's clients to opioid overdose. In 2013, the majority were young men and women between the age of 18 and 25.

In response to this epidemic I urge you to please support HB 5487, to ensure Connecticut residents struggling with substance abuse, have a chance to get the help and support they need. Thank you.